"A Day in the Life" is a song by the British rock band The Beatles written by John Lennon and Paul McCartney, based on an original idea by Lennon. It is the final track on the group's 1967 album Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band. Since its original album release, "A Day in the Life" has been released as a B-side, and also on various compilation albums, and has been covered by other artists including The Fall, Bobby Darin, Sting, Neil Young, Jeff Beck, The Bee Gees and since 2008, by Paul McCartney in his live performances.

Rolling Stone magazine ranked it the 26th greatest song of all time. [1]

Contents

1 Lyrical inspiration and collaboration
2 Recording
3 Song structure
3.1 The final chord
3.2 Variations
4 Supposed drug references
5 Recognition
6 Cover versions and references
   6.1 Cover versions
7 Personnel
8 See also
9 Notes
10 Further reading
11 External links

Lyrical inspiration and collaboration

There is some dispute about the inspiration for the first verse. Many believe that it was written with regard to the death of Tara Browne, the 21-year-old heir to the Guinness fortune and close friend of Lennon and McCartney, who had crashed his Lotus Elite on 18 December 1966 when a Volkswagen pulled out of a side street into his path in Redcliffe Gardens, Earls Court. [2] In numerous interviews, Lennon claimed this was the verse's prime inspiration. However, George Martin adamantly claims that it is a drug reference (as is the line "I'd love to turn you on" and other passages from the song) and while writing the lyrics John and Paul were imagining a stoned politician who had stopped at a set of traffic lights. [3]

The description of the accident in "A Day in the Life" was not a literal description of Browne's fatal accident. Lennon said, "I didn't copy the accident. Tara didn't blow his mind out, but it was in my mind when I was writing that verse. The details of the accident in the song — not noticing traffic lights and a crowd forming at the scene — were similarly part of the fiction." [4]

The final verse was inspired by an article in the Daily Mail in January 1967 regarding a substantial amount of potholes in Blackburn, a town in Lancashire. However, he had a problem with the words of the final verse, not being able to think of how to connect "Now they know how many holes it takes to" and "the Albert Hall". His friend Terry Doran suggested that they would "fill" the Albert Hall. [5]

McCartney provided the middle section of the song, a short piano piece he had been working on independently, with lyrics about a commuter whose uneventful morning routine leads him to drift off into a reverie. He had written the line "I'd love to turn you on", which concludes both verse sections, was, according to Lennon, also inspired by an article about a stoned politician. [6]

Recording

The Beatles began recording the song, with a working title "In the Life of...", on 19 January 1967, in the innovative and creative studio atmosphere ushered in by the recording of Strawberry Fields Forever and Penny Lane over the preceding weeks. [8] The two sections of the song are separated by a 24-bar bridge. At first, The Beatles were not sure how to fill this transition. Thus, at the conclusion of the recording session for the basic tracks, this section solely consisted of a simple repeated piano chord and the voice of assistant Mal Evans counting the bars. Evans's guide vocal was treated with gradually increasing amounts of echo.

The 24-bar bridge section ended with the sound of an alarm clock triggered by Evans. The original intent was to edit out the ringing alarm clock when the missing section was filled in; however it complemented McCartney's piece well; the first line of McCartney's song began "Woke up, fell out of bed", so the decision was made to keep the sound. [9] Martin later said that editing it out would have been unfeasible in any case. [10]

The basic track for the song was refined with remixing and additional parts added at recording sessions on 20 January and 3 February. [9] Still, there was no solution for the missing 24-bar middle section of the song, when McCartney had the idea of bringing in a full orchestra to fill the gap. [9] To allay concerns that classically-trained musicians would not be able to improvise the section, producer George Martin wrote a loose score for the section. It was an extended atonal crescendo that encouraged the musicians to improvise within the defined framework. [9]

The orchestral part was recorded on 10 February 1967, with McCartney and Martin conducting a 40-piece orchestra. The recording session was completed at a total cost of £367 for the players, an extravagance at the time. [11] Martin later described explaining his improvised score to the puzzled orchestra:

McCartney noted that the strings were able to keep themselves in the designated time, while the trumpets were "much
McCartney had originally wanted a 90-piece orchestra, but this proved impossible; the difference was made up, as the semi-impromptu segment was recorded multiple times and eventually four different recordings were overdubbed into a single massive crescendo. The results were successful; in the final edit of the song, the orchestral bridge is reprise after the final verse.

It was arranged for the orchestral session to be filmed by NEMS Enterprises for use in a planned television special. The film was never released in its entirety, although portions of it can be seen in the "A Day in the Life" promotional film, which includes shots of studio guests Mick Jagger, Marianne Faithfull, Keith Richards, Donovan, Pattie Boyd and Michael Nesmith.

Reflecting The Beatles' taste for experimentation and the avant garde at this point in their careers, the orchestra players were asked to wear or were given a costume piece on top of their formal dress. This resulted in different players wearing anything from red noses to fake stick-on nipples. Martin recalled that the lead violinist performed wearing a gorilla paw, while a bassoon player placed a balloon on the end of his instrument.

Due to the multiple takes required to perfect the orchestral cacophony and the final chord, as well as their considerable procrastination in composing the song, the total duration of time spent recording "A Day in the Life" was 34 hours. In contrast, the Beatles' earliest work, their first album Please Please Me, was recorded in its entirety in only 10 hours.

Song structure

The song comprises portions originally authored independently by Lennon and McCartney, two cacophonous, part-improvised, orchestra crescendos, and a sustained final piano chord. While Lennon's lyrics were inspired by contemporary newspaper articles, McCartney's were reminiscent of his youth. The decisions to link sections of the song with orchestral crescendos and to end the song with a sustained piano chord were made only after the rest of the song had been recorded.

"A Day in the Life" is in the key of G major, but, as Alan W. Pollack explains, "its true center of gravity is in the parallel minor of G Major and the Major keys of E. The verses are in G-major/E-minor and the bridge is in E-major. A 4/4 meter is used throughout. The song is laid out with an instrumental beginning, followed by three verses (0:13), an orchestral crescendo (1:45), a middle section (2:16), an orchestral bridge (2:49), the final verse (3:19), a second orchestral crescendo (3:50), and a final piano chord (4:21–5:05).

Each verse is sung by Lennon and follows the same basic layout, but each has a different way of ending. The first verse, which is twenty measures, ends with a repetition of the F major chord progression before returning to the home key. The second verse, two measures shorter than the first, ends on the C major chord rather than repeating the F major progression. The third verse is the same as the second, except that there is one more measure to accommodate the "I'd love to"), and the verse does not return to the home key. Instead it leads to a bridge, a 24-measure long glissando-like crescendo starting from low E to an E several octaves higher. Random cymbal crashes are interspersed near the end to "challenge your sense of meter."

An alarm clock rings, beginning McCartney's middle section. While the pulse of this section remains the same, the accents suggest a tempo twice as fast as that of the verses before. The three chords in this nineteen measures long section are the I, flat V, and V chords (E, D, and B). This is followed by an orchestral bridge: a repeated circle of fifths (from C to E) over twenty measures. The bridge is accompanied by a wordless vocal ("Ahhhh..."") and leads to the fourth and final verse.

The final verse has the same layout as the third verse. Starr's drumming, however, retains its double-time feel from McCartney's section. This verse leads to the second crescendo. However, after the orchestra hits its highest note, there is a measure of silence, which leads to the final E-major piano chord.

The final chord

Following the final orchestral crescendo, the song ends with one of the most famous final chords in music history. Lennon, McCartney, Starr, and Evans shared three different pianos and played an E-major chord simultaneously. The final chord was made to ring out for over forty seconds by increasing the recording sound level as the vibration faded out. Towards the end of the chord the recording level was so high that listeners can hear the sounds of the studio, including rustling papers and a squeaking chair.

The piano chord was a replacement for a failed vocal experiment: on the evening following the orchestra recording session, the four Beatles had originally recorded an ending of their voices humming the chord, but after multiple overdubs they found that they wanted something with more impact.

Variations

On the Sgt. Pepper album, the start of "A Day in the Life" is cross-faded with the applause at the end of the previous track "Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band (Reprise)". On the The Beatles 1967–1970 LP, "A Day in the Life" fades in through the Sgt. Pepper cross-fade, but on the CD version of 1967–1970, the song starts cleanly, without any fade or cross-fade.

Following "A Day in the Life" on the Sgt. Pepper album is a high frequency tone and a few seconds of gibberish. Recorded two months after the mono and stereo masters for "A Day in the Life" had been finalised, the gibberish (entitled in the session notes "Edit for LP End") was added to the run-out groove of the initial British pressing. See the Sgt. Pepper album for details.

On Anthology 2, in an early, pre-orchestral version of the song, McCartney can be heard saying "See, the worst thing about doing this, that we're doing something like this, is that I think that at first people, sort of, are a bit suspicious. You know, 'Come on, what are you up to?' But the thing is it really is just..." before the song fades out.

The Anthology 3 version of "The End" concludes with the final chord of "A Day in the Life", played backwards and then forwards, to bring closure to the Anthology CD series.

Supposed drug references

The song became controversial for its supposed references to drugs. On 1 June 1967, the day the Sgt. Pepper LP was released, the BBC announced it was banning "A Day in the Life" from British stations due to the line "I'd love to
Lennon and McCartney denied that there were drug references and publicly complained about the ban at a dinner party celebrating their new album to their manager, Brian Epstein. Lennon said that the song was simply about “a crash and its victim”, and called the line in question “the most innocent of phrases.” McCartney later flatly denied the drug allegations, saying that “what we want to do is to turn you on to the truth rather than ...pot.” However, George Martin later commented that he had always suspected that the line “found my way upstairs and had a smoke” was a drug reference, recalling how the Beatles would “disappear and have a little puff”, presumably of cannabis, but not in front of him.

When Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band was released in South Asia, Malaysia and Hong Kong, “A Day in the Life” was excluded along with “With A Little Help from My Friends” and “Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds” because of supposed drug references.

Recognition

“A Day in the Life” is one of The Beatles’ most influential songs. Paul Grushkin in his book Rockin’ Down the Highway: The Cars and People That Made Rock Roll, called the song “one of the most ambitious, influential, and groundbreaking works in pop music history.” In “From Craft to Art: Formal Structure in the Music of the Beatles”, the song is described thus: “A Day in the Life” is perhaps one of the most important single tracks in the history of rock music; clocking in at only four minutes and forty-five seconds, it must surely be among the shortest epic pieces in rock.

The song appears on many top songs lists. It placed twentieth on CBC's 50 Tracks, the second highest Beatles song on the list after “In My Life”. It placed first in Q Magazine's list of the 50 greatest British songs of all time, and was at the top of Mojo Magazine's 101 Greatest Beatles Songs, as decided by a panel of musicians and journalists.

“A Day in the Life” was also nominated for a Grammy in 1967 for Best Arrangement Accompanying Vocalist Or Instrumentalist.

On 27 August 1992 Lennon’s original handwritten lyrics were sold by the estate of Mal Evans in an auction at Sotheby's London for £100,000 ($156,600). The lyrics were put up for sale again in March 2006 by Bonhams in New York. Sealed bids were opened on 7 March 2006 and offers started at about $2 million.

In 2004, Rolling Stone ranked “A Day in the Life” at number 26 on the magazine’s list of the 500 Greatest Songs of All Time.

Cover versions and references

“A Day in the Life” has been covered and referenced numerous times by other artists. Jazz guitarist Wes Montgomery covered the song and used it as the title track to his instrumental album “A Day in the Life” (arranged and conducted by Don Sebesky). Phish have covered the song several times throughout their career. The Cat's Miaow version of “A Day in the Life” omitted the orchestral and middle sections, and appeared on their 1996 A Kiss and a Cuddle album. Alternative rock band Mae recorded a version of the song for their album The Everglow EP in 2006. Jazz guitarist Grant Green covered the song on his 1970 album Green Is Beautiful (Blue Note Records). The Libertines' Carl Barat and Pete Doherty covered “A Day in the Life” for BBC Radio 2's 40-year-anniversary celebration of Sgt. Pepper, broadcast 16 June 2007. Sting recorded a version of the song on MTV Unplugged. Brie Larson recorded an acoustic version exclusively for her MySpace page. Type O Negative (who have been highly influenced by the Beatles) referenced the song at the closing of their song “Kill You Tonight (Reprise)” with the famous extended E-major chord.

In 2008, Yoko Ono toured with a 100-piece collection of Lennon’s artwork drawn between 1968 and 1980 under the title, “A Day in the Life.” The tour presented non-original limited edition copies, with many having colour added later on Ono's orders.

Neil Young played a version of the song during both his 2008 European summer tour, his 2008 North American winter tour, and his 2009 Australia and New Zealand tour.

Paul McCartney played ‘A Day in the Life’ during The Liverpool Sound Festival at Anfield Stadium in Liverpool together with Give Peace A Chance.

Eric Burdon & War recorded “A Day in the Life” in an early session in 1969. The incomplete version with 11 minutes was released on their 1976 compilation album, Love Is All Around.

The Devo song "Some Things Never Change" from the 1988 album Total Devo paid homage to the song, starting with the nearly identical, “I saw the news today oh boy”, and following similar structure. Soundhog produced a remix version of the song called “A Day in Tracy's Life”, incorporating Mogwai's song "Tracy" and bits of work by Kid Loco. Zack de la Rocha & DJ Shadow track "March of death" contains verse “I read the news today oh boy”. Mark Z. Danielewski quotes part of the song's lyrics (“I saw a film today, oh boy”) in the beginning of his book House of Leaves. David Bowie’s “Young Americans from the album of the same name features chorus singers singing the line “I saw the news today, oh boy”.

The Dream Theater song Six Degrees of Inner Turbulence ends with a sustained E major chord played on synthesizer that fades out for approximately 2 minutes, much like the ending chord of “A Day in the Life”.

Brand New references the ending lyric of “Never to see any other way” in their song “Play Crack the Sky” off of Deja Entendu. After the song appears over, a closing door can be heard as well as Jesse Lacey repeating those words.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cover artist</th>
<th>Release date</th>
<th>Album title</th>
<th>Additional information</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wes Montgomery</td>
<td>1967</td>
<td>A Day In The Life</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brian Auger and the Trinity</td>
<td>1968</td>
<td>Definitely What</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Grant Green | Jan 30, 1970 | Green Is Beautiful[54]
Lighthouse | 1971 | One Fine Light
Eric Burdon & War | 1976 | Love is All Around[55]
London Symphony Orchestra | 1978 | Classic Rock: Second Movement
Sting | 1993 | Demolition Man[56]
London Starlight Orchestra | Apr 23, 1996 | 20 Beatles Greatest Hits[57] Instrumental
Mae | Nov 21, 2006 | The Everglow EP[58]
Jeff Beck | Nov 24, 2008 | Performing This Week: Live at Ronnie Scott's Jazz Club[59]

Personnel

Words and Music by John Lennon and Paul McCartney
Published by Northern Songs

Performance:
- John Lennon: double tracked lead vocals (on all the verses), acoustic guitar, maracas and piano (final E chord).
- Paul McCartney: piano, lead vocals (on the middle eight), and bass guitar.
- George Harrison: maracas, acoustic guitar
- Ringo Starr: drums, congas and piano (final E chord).
- George Martin: harmonium (final E chord) and producer.
- Mal Evans: alarm clock, counting, piano (final E chord)
- Geoff Emerick: engineering and mixing.

Orchestrated by George Martin, Paul McCartney and John Lennon.
Conducted by George Martin and Paul McCartney.
John Marston: harp
John Underwood, Gwynne Edwards, Bernard Davis, John Meek: viola
Francisco Gabarbo, Dennis Vigay, Alan Delziel, Alex Nilosi: cello
Cyril Mac Arthur, Gordon Pearce: double bass
Roger Lord: oboe
Basil Tchaikovsky, Jack Brymer: clarinet
N. Fawcott, Alfred Waters: bassoon
Clifford Seville, David Sandeman: flute
Alan Civil, Neil Sanders: french horn
David Mason, Monty Montgomery, Harold Jackson: trumpet
Raymond Brown, Raymond Premru, T. Moore: trombone
Michael Barnes: tuba
Tristan Fry: timpani.[60]

See also
- List of songs banned by the BBC

Notes

1. ↑ [1][6][7][8][9][10][11][12]. Rolling Stone. Retrieved on 2009-05-05